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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000116

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: POLICE DISCUSS ATTACKERS BUT HAVE NOT FOUND THE ATTACK'S
MASTERMIND

REF: A) MASERU 113 B) MASERU 112 C) MASERU 111 AND PREVIOUS

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Summary

¶1. The Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) held a press conference on Friday, April 24, 2009, at Police Headquarters to brief the media on their investigations into the attempted assassination of the Prime Minister and attacks on military barracks. Police announced that three suspects were in custody in Lesotho, seven in custody in South Africa, and four had been killed. Two Mozambicans and several South Africans are among those in custody. Former member of the LDF Makotoko Lerotholi was said to have escaped arrest, but police implicated him as being behind the attack. Afterwards, the arms, ammunition, and other hardware seized from the gunmen were displayed for the media, including Lesotho Television.

Police point finger at a former member of the LDF

¶2. The Lesotho Police, led by the Assistant Commissioner for CIS, John Selete, convened a press conference to update the media on their investigation into the attempted assassination of the Lesotho Prime Minister, Pakalitha Mosisili, at his official residence; and the attack at Makoanyane Barracks, where a purpose-built armored vehicle, several military Land Rovers, arms, and other military hardware were seized by insurgents per ref tel C. Selete confirmed that three people were in police custody. He indicated that two of the gunmen were from Beira, Mozambique, and one, Chauke Mabaso, from Limpopo Province, South Africa. He added that a total of four gunmen died in Lesotho while seven were arrested in South Africa. The Police also mentioned that they were working on an extradition process with the relevant GOL authorities and their South African counterparts to bring those arrested in South Africa to face justice in Lesotho, where they would face attempted murder and robbery charges. The Assistant Commissioner also revealed that one of the attackers was a Lesotho national. He stated that Makotoko Lerotholi, 60 years old and a former member of the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF), who was implicated in the June 2007 attacks on the residences of GOL ministers, was involved in the attack on the PM's residence. Lerotholi was formerly the personal bodyguard of opposition leader Tom Thabane of the All Basotho Convention (ABC).

Use of mercenaries new scenario in Lesotho

¶3. During the conference, the LMPS confirmed the presence of

Mozambican police in Lesotho to assist in identifying the gunmen who claimed to be from Mozambique. Selete pointed out that during their interrogation, the two gunmen stressed that they were unaware that they were in Lesotho. They claimed that they were in South Africa several weeks ago where they were offered a job at a construction site. The duo stated that they were put on a truck to be transported to a "construction site" but to their "dismay" they were dumped on a farm and issued camouflage uniforms and AK-47 rifles and ordered to undergo military-style training which lasted at least two weeks. They also claimed their passports had been confiscated by their instructors. A senior police officer told the Embassy in confidence that the investigation revealed that the men from Mozambique are thought to be either fighters from the former rebel group, RENAMO (now opposition), or from the governing FRELIMO party.

Military hardware seized at the scene

¶4. The police displayed all the weapons and military hardware seized during operations carried out by security forces. These included eleven AK-47s, one R5 and two R4 rifles, an Uzi sub-machine gun, and 218 rounds of ammunition. There were also several pairs of combat boots and camouflage uniforms with bullet-proof gear.

Opposition leader urges LCD to hold internal investigation

¶5. Meanwhile, ABC leader Thabane held a rally in Leribe District on Sunday, April 26, following his return from election-related rallies in South Africa. According to Embassy sources, Thabane indicated that "if there was anybody with enough money and resources to bring mercenaries into this country, it would have to be someone in the governing LCD." He even went further to

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urge the LCD to conduct their own internal investigation into this matter so that the truth could be revealed in the interest of the public.

Comment

¶6. The presence of mercenaries in Lesotho is unprecedented in Lesotho's recent history. This has left local analysts and the general public puzzled. Even though the police were reluctant to answer questions relating to the military, including what transpired at the Makoanyane Barracks, local media and political analysts are adamant that whoever carried out this operation had connections within the LDF. The fact that an armored vehicle, arms, and ammunition - which are supposed to be kept in a secure environment - were seized with relative ease, has created more questions than answers. Another worrying factor is that the police are not sure of the exact number of the gunmen. Their closest estimate is between 15 and 30. In addition, it is not clear if the others are still in the country or if they escaped across the porous border to South Africa. According to Embassy contacts, the silence of the army is a matter of concern. There is a general feeling that the LDF should make a statement to assure the nation that they are still able to protect the citizens of Lesotho as well as the Kingdom's territorial integrity. Post will continue to update the Department as more information becomes available.

NOLAN